Bridgeport Evening Post.

THURSDAY, AUGUST 10, 1899.

ELECTRICAL EXPERT TALKS

G. B. Underwood Before the Coroner and Jury.

EXAMINED MOTORS ON CAR

Had Been Tampered With—Show That Power was Off.

The third session of the inquiry into the causes of the Shelton extension catastrophe began this morning shortly before 11 o'clock. Outside of the coroner, jury, witnesses and newspaper men, the only persons in the room were Motorman George Hamilton and two other men who sat on either side of him close to the door of the court room.

The motorman had an anxious look on his face. He kept his eyes riveted on each witness as they were giving in their testimony. He did not appear to be as well as yesterday. His eyes had a more sunken look and he had every appearance of having a sleepless night.

E. B. Underwood, secretary and treasurer of the Connecticut Electrical Co. of New Haven and this city, was summoned to this city this morning to give expert testimony on the condition of the motors, brake and anything else that might enlighten the jury.

He proved to be a first-class witness and there is no doubt but what the jury was very much impressed with the information imparted by Mr. Underwood. He made an examination of the motors and found them to be in first-class condition. The controller indicated that the power was shut off.

He also thought that the car was going at a high rate of speed in order to traverse the distance it did after it left the rails.

George E. Hall, superintendent of the Birdsey, Somers Corset factory, gave some valuable testimony. He went over to the place of the accident on Monday morning between 8 and 9 o'clock. He had his camera with him and he saw a number of workmen unloading cars and tamping the dirt around the ties. He took a number of snap shots.

These pictures were exhibited in the court room this morning and were scanned closely by the coroner and jury. The evidence gleaned from him was rather in favor of the motorman. He thought there was a defect in the road bed. After he had taken the pictures he thought that they might be useful at the coroner's inquest.

It was nearly 12 o'clock when the testimony of these two witnesses was taken and then the coroner announced that there were no other witnesses. He said that he wanted to get the testimony of some of the injured who survived the wreck, and who were at the Bridgeport hospital at the present time.

He further stated that the hospital authorities would allow the jury to go to the hospital and take the testimony of two or three, and if they would wait a couple of days, the injured would be sufficiently well to go to the court room.

Eugene B. Underwood, an electric expert from the Connecticut Electrical Co. of this city, and New Haven, was the first witness called. He stated that he had been connected with the Connecticut Electrical Co. for sometime and had formerly been in the employ of the General Electric Co. of New York.

Witness went over to the scene of the accident and examined the car. He took particular care in looking over the motors and controllers and in examining the wheels and the rails. From the appearance of the controllers he was of the opinion that they had been tampered with since the car went off the track; some one had taken several of the fingers off with a screwdriver; the controller was partially open; from their appearance witness was of the opinion that the controllers were in good order at the time of the accident.

The position of the controller indicated that the power was shut off; motors were in perfect condition. The brakes were equally as good; made examination of track; from its appearance the flanges rode on rail 20 or 30 feet before leaving, then dropped on planking; the flange of wheel indicated that it scraped the side of rail; if power had been on at this time there would have been a flash and the rails would have shown it by being burned. As this was not the case it would indicate that the power had been shut off.

The distance from where the car left the rails to where it went over the bridge was approximately 100 feet. "In my opinion the car could have been stopped with the brake," said the witness. "It was not necessary to reverse the power."

"You said before that the controller had the appearance of being opened by a screwdriver. Now what is your opinion? Was the controller smashed open or opened by a screwdriver?" asked the coroner.

"I should say that they were smashed open" said the witness.

"Is it usual on trolley roads to have an inside guard rail?"

"I should think that it was a usual thing."

"Having visited the place, could you tell what was the cause of the accident?"

"In going down the incline and approaching the bridge, there was necessarily considerable jouncing. The car must have been traveling very fast, to go the distance it did without being stopped. I could not tell whether the brakes had been applied."

"If a car was running about six miles an hour in how many feet could it be stopped, with the appliances at hand?"

"I should say that a car could be stopped a little over its own length. I should say that a car could be stopped quicker with the reverse than with the brake."

George E. Hawes, superintendent of the Birdsey & Somers Corset factory was at the scene of trolley accident Monday morning from 8 to 9 o'clock. "My attention was called to laborers, who were at work," said the witness. "They were unloading dirt and tramping the dirt between the ties.

"This was about 150 feet from the abutment. I saw two loads put there.

"I took some photographs. They are of the men who were unloading the cars; the men who were tramping the dirt were between the ties and the cars. I just took the pictures for my own amusement."

At this juncture the six pictures which were taken were handed to the coroner and then submitted to the jury.

"Was your attention called to any dirt being removed from under the ties?"

"I should think from the number of men who were tramping, that dirt was removed from under the ties."

The hearing was then adjourned until 2 o'clock.

AFTERNOON'S PROCEEDINGS.

The inquest was resumed at 2 o'clock and Ephraim Wakelee of Stratford, was called to the stand. He worked on trolley road in month of June; was at scene of accident fifteen minutes after it happened; when he heard of the accident last Sunday he went to the place on his wheel; he also went there at 6:45 o'clock Monday morning; saw men shoveling gravel about 200 feet from the abutment; saw no tamping; saw the men try the track guage; did not notice any dirt loose under the ties; noticed cars going back and forth in the morning; did not notice anything out of order.

"On Monday morning I saw some boys fooling around the controller and open the door which closes the work. I stopped them and sent them away," said the witness. "In the afternoon I saw a man who had a bicycle suit on and a Bridgeport Traction Co.'s badge, No. 20, go to the controller and take the fuse out. I told him at the time he had no business to take the fuse. He said he thought he had and went away."

Albert C. Innis of Stratford, was employed by the Traction Co. as constable during Sunday evening; was at scene of the accident. "I was one of the men who went on top of the bridge to fasten the tackles," said the witness. "When I was on my way I saw three or four loose ties south of the bridge, with nothing holding them but the rails. While we were moving the bodies several cars passed over the bridge. When I was on the bridge there was no one there. I did not see Motorman Hamilton.

"The impression I had of the cause of the accident at the time was the looseness of the ties."

At the time of going to press W. W. Starr was giving some testimony in regard to the construction of the bridge.

MOTORMAN ON WITNESS STAND

Hamilton Tells His Story to Coroner and Jury.

DID HIS BEST TO STOP CAR

Was Not Going Fast—Reversed Controller But There was No Power.

Coroner Charles A. Doten and jury continued the inquiry of the Shelton extension horror yesterday afternoon and the most important witness of the day, George A. Hamilton, the motorman who ran car No. 2 to destruction, was put upon the stand.

He walked to the witness box with an unsteady step. There was almost a look of despair on his face. Once or twice he glanced from the windows to the left of the jury. His eyes then sought the floor and his head lowered and looking about ten feet ahead he continued on this way until told to hold his hand up to be sworn.

He turned his head towards the coroner. Their eyes met and after the oath had been administered he responded with "I do," in a firm voice. He then took his seat and faced the jury. It could be seen that he was laboring under great mental strain.

There was a tremor in his voice and it was with difficulty that he was able to start in with the testimony. He soon collected himself, however, and with a clear firm voice he told the listeners what he knew about the sad affair.

As Hamilton walked to the witness stand every eye was upon him and when he began to talk every word was carefully listened to as thought what he said was to determine the exact cause of the accident and thereby end the inquiry.

This was undoubtedly the intention of the coroner for Motorman Hamilton was held for the last witness to be summoned to the stand. When the coroner had finished asking questions, he did not think that the testimony received was sufficient so he ordered a continuance of the inquest at 10:30 o'clock to-day.

Motorman Hamilton made a decided impression on the jury and coroner. His story was connected and although in a nervous frame of mind, when plied with questions he answered them in a straightforward way. There was no hesitancy on his part in telling what he knew. What he said was considerably in his favor.

In commencing he said: "I board at 1731 Stratford avenue. I have been in the employ of the Bridgeport Traction Co., for the past five years and over four years have been a motorman. I have run on almost every line of the company and never had an accident until last Sunday.

"Four months ago I was employed as conductor. I preferred the front end of the car and asked for the change. The superintendent complied with my wish and I was put on as a regular motorman.

"I was on the car which went off Peck's Mill bridge last Sunday afternoon. I was to have made four runs that day. I left on car No. 2 at8:15 o'clock in the morning and went to Shelton and back. It took just three hours to make the trip arriving at the lower bridge at 11:15.

"I started right out again and got back at 2:40. The trip was made this time in three hours and 25 minutes. The delay of 25 minutes was on account of more people riding on that trip than on the previous one. There were a great many stops.

"It was just about 2:40 when I started the car again to make the third trip. I had no dinner nor anything that day. I left on car No. 2 at 8:15 in the morning. I asked the inspector if anyone was there to relieve me for it was time that I should be relieved.

"The inspector said that my relief had also been late in getting in and had not got around to take car No. 2. I felt disappointed but did not say anything further. As it is always customary to run your car until you get relieved. I started out again."

"Did you have any instruction how to run your car?" was asked.

"Last Friday evening I was instructed by Supt. Butler. He told me to be careful and run my car slowly around curves and across bridges."

"It has been reported that you called to the conductor's wife on the way and said that the inspector was no better than a wooden man, is this so?"

"It is not. I board in the same house as the conductor and all I said was that we would need a lunch when we returned.

"I stopped the car at the turnout, south of the bridge. A number of passengers got off. When I started up again I turned the controller three notches and shut off the power within 100 feet of the bridge. The car was not going fast and so far as I could see everything was in good condition. I did not run the car any faster than on previous occasions. I did not notice that any passengers had any fear.

"When the car neared the approach of the abutment it rocked a little. It jolted some when it went on the abutment but it did not teeter any more than at any other time. I was not running the car any faster than on any other trip.

"The first time I noticed there was any trouble was when I got on the bridge about 15 feet. The car jumped the rails. I immediately reversed the power and to my horror I found that I had no power. I did not do anything with the brake first because I knew that the car was off the track and had to be stopped quick. I had a nine notch controller on the car and I knew by reversing the power that the car could be brought to a sudden stop.

"When I found that there was no power I immediately set the brake. I could not say how far the car ran after that. My only thought was to stop it. I saw it was going to topple over and I dove off the front end."

"If the car had been on the rails and you wanted to stop it suddenly how many feet would it take to stop it with the brake?"

"I should judge that I could stop most any car which was running about ten miles an hour in about 15 feet."

"If such is the case how do you account for the car which went over the trestle bumping on ties for fully 100 feet before it was stopped?"

"I cannot account for it and I also cannot account for the car leaving the track.

"When I dove off the front end of the car the gates which are generally closed were open. I landed on the bridge on my head and did not know any more until I regained consciousness in a hack. I had no conversation with any of the passengers."

Mr. Judson asked what was done to stop the car and in reply witness said:

"I shut the power off first, then reversed the controller handle and put the power on again. There was no power so I set the brake up tight. It is a usual thing to reverse the power when it is known that a car is off the track."

"In reversing the power do you have to use both hands?"

"Yes sir, your hand is off the brake for the instant, for it only takes a moment to change the controller."

"Do you think that you nearly stopped the car before it went over the trestle?"

"Yes sir."

"Don't you think that it would have been safer to apply the brake before you reversed the power?"

"In this instance I think it would, but ordinarily it is safer to reverse the power.

"If the conditions were normal and the car was running on the rails at a good speed you say that you could stop it inside of 15 feet. Now I want to ask you if you could stop car No. 2 at the rate it was ging down the incline in the same distance."

"Yes sir, I could have stopped it in a much shorter distance.

"What made you jump from the car?" At this question the witness hesitated and his face changed color. He looked the questioner straight in the eye and answered that he knew the car was going over and his first thoughts were to get off.

"It is a mystery to us how you could stop a car on the rails so suddenly when on the bridge it could not be stopped within 100 feet?"

"All I know is that I used all the means that I could in stopping the car."

"Have you ever had occasion before to reverse the power on a car that you were running?"

"I have had occasion a number of times to stop my car suddenly when approaching teams, and to avoid accident I almost invariably reverse the power."

"Did you have any personal words with the inspector before you left the lower bridge?"

"No sir, I did not, further than to say that I was over time in making the last trip and in all probability would be much longer in making this one."

"Did you see William Kelley jump from the car?"

'I did not."

This was the last question put to Motorman Hamilton, he being in the witness stand from 3:10 until 4 o'clock.

The witness preceding Motorman Hamilton was James H. Edwards of East Berlin, civil engineer of the Berlin Bridge Co. His connection with the construction of the bridge was to inspect the plans and specifications, which he said were submitted to the company by Scofield & Starr. They were simply outlines when they came from the latter company and the Berlin Bridge Co. completed them.

Witness did not think that the height of a guard rail made it any safer for a car in regard to it going off the track.

"The majority of guard rails are not over eight inches high," said the witness.

He spoke of the guard rails being higher on the elevated roads in New York but did not think they were any safer than the ones used on the trestle.

Mr. Edwards saw the bridge Monday morning and only looked at it casually. The Berlin Co. placed the ties, superstructure and guard rails on the bridge.

When asked if he thought the construction was complete, witness said that he was not a railroad constructor and therefore could not tell.

William J. Brooks, foreman of the linemen for the Bridgeport Traction Co., was put upon the stand for the purpose of telling who a man by the name of Pollard was who was in the employ of the Berlin Bridge Co. Coroner Doten was told that Pollard could tell more about how the accident occurred than any other person.

Mr. Brooks stated that he knew Pollard for the past four or five years. He is employed by the Berlin Bridge Co., but has never been anything else but a laborer. He never knew him to do anything but gather up tools and carry water to the men. At present he was working in New York. Witness did not think he had anything to do with the construction of the trestle.